

LYNCHBURG CITY COUNCIL

Agenda Item Summary

MEETING DATE: **June 25, 2002**

AGENDA ITEM NO.: 9

CONSENT:

REGULAR: **X**

CLOSED SESSION:

(Confidential)

ACTION: **X**

INFORMATION:

ITEM TITLE: **Appeal of Historic Preservation Commission Decision Concerning Property at 1417-1419 Clay Street**

RECOMMENDATION: Uphold the Decision of the HPC to Deny the Certificate of Appropriateness

SUMMARY: On May 5 Mr. Bobby G. Slaughter, 1417-1419 Clay Street, filed a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) application with the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) requesting permission to install two steel front entrance doors on his house at 1417-1419 Clay Street. On May 20, the HPC considered Mr. Slaughter's application. The HPC issued COA #70 denying his request. Subsequent to such action, by letter dated May 23, Mr. Slaughter appealed the HPC's decision to City Council.

PRIOR ACTION(S):

May 20: Motion made by HPC Member to approve the COA application failed for lack of a second; therefore, motion was denied (5-0)

FISCAL IMPACT: N/A

CONTACT(S):

Rachel Flynn/847-1508, ext. 253
Annette Chenault/847-1508, ext. 258

ATTACHMENT(S):

- Resolution
- Background/Summary Report
- Letter of Appeal
- HPC Minutes
- Photographs
- Vicinity Map

REVIEWED BY:

RESOLUTION

A RESOLUTION TO APPROVE THE APPEAL FOR A CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS.

BE IT RESOLVED That the Council of the City of Lynchburg hereby approves the appeal of a request for the Certificate of Appropriateness application filed by Bobby G. Slaughter to install two steel front entrance doors at 1417-1419 Clay Street.

Adopted:

Certified:

Clerk of Council

141L

**1417-1419 CLAY STREET
APPEAL OF HPC DECISION
BACKGROUND/SUMMARY**

SUMMARY

- Entrances and porches are often the primary focal points of a historic structure's façade. Because of their rich decoration, they help define the style of the building. Substituting wood doors with stock items from building supply companies, whose doors are more appropriate for new dwellings than historic houses, is not in keeping with historic standards.
- The City's publication Residential Historic Districts Design Guidelines does not recommend installation of steel doors. When the HPC made its decision to oppose the steel doors, it was based on the Guidelines.
- The existing wood front entrance doors replaced the original doors prior to the creation of the Diamond Hill Historic District. They are not historic in design but are of the same original material (wood). To remove wood doors and substitute with steel doors would be opposed to the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation* in that the new doors should match the original doors in composition, design, color, texture and other visual qualities.
- If Council's decision would be to support this appeal, it would set a precedent for future cases. Property owners who buy properties in Historic Districts often do so because they expect the historic designation to protect their investment. Allowing property owners to deviate from the basic guidelines of historic preservation undermines the purpose of a Historic District, which is to protect real estate investments and stabilize neighborhoods.
- Most historic wooden doors, if they are solid wood or paneled, have good thermal properties and should not be replaced with those of different materials. Doors that would follow the guidelines can be purchased new or used (i.e., an architectural salvage yard).
- The current wood doors on Mr. Slaughter's house are not original but are stock doors. Since Mr. Slaughter requests to replace these doors, there is the opportunity to replace them with solid wood or wood panel doors, which would be the material and design of the original doors.

I. BACKGROUND

On May 5 Mr. Bobby G. Slaughter, 1417-1419 Clay Street, filed a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) application with the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) requesting permission to install two steel front entrance doors on his house at 1417-1419 Clay Street. On May 20, the HPC considered Mr. Slaughter's application. Mr. Slaughter attended the meeting and spoke on behalf of his request indicating that the installation of steel doors on his house was desirable and would provide extra savings in cutting energy costs, as well as provide additional security. The HPC issued COA #70 denying his request. Subsequent to such action, by letter dated May 23, Mr. Slaughter appealed the HPC's decision to City Council.

II. ANALYSIS

1. The house at 1417-1419 Clay Street was built ca. 1885. It is located on the West Side of Clay Street in the central part of the Diamond Hill Historic District. It has two-stories and is a frame vernacular duplex with a gable roof, five bays and a one-story, four-bay porch with curved brackets and turned balustrade in the center three bays. It has exterior end chimneys. It has artificial (aluminum) siding over the original clapboard siding. It was covered with artificial siding, and the front entrance doors were replaced before Diamond Hill was designated a local Historic District. Although the original siding has been altered, the house is similar in character to other houses in the District, with its original siding likely still intact beneath the artificial siding.
2. The *National Register of Historic Places Inventory* describes the Diamond Hill Historic District as an attractive residential neighborhood, which was laid out on a grid plan, modified to accommodate the irregularities of the terrain. It is approximately fourteen blocks in area and wedged between the

Lynchburg Expressway (Route 29) to the south and the city's central commercial core to the north. Bounded by steep slopes, it encompasses a complex network of streets in response to the difficult topography. While experiencing its greatest period of growth at the turn of the 20th century, the district holds several mid-19th-century houses. The houses range from speculative houses erected as rental units to upper-middle-class residences.

3. The Residential Historic Districts Design Guidelines describes Diamond Hill as the most complex and diverse of the historic districts, containing a rich array of architectural styles and building sizes. With 111 contributing buildings, Diamond Hill is the second largest of the city's six historic districts. Buildings and open space throughout the district are generally in good condition and well maintained. The district is nearly fully developed with few vacant lots or dilapidated buildings. The majority of the buildings on Clay Street are medium scale, frame vernacular residences.

The Design Guidelines does not recommend removing or radically changing entrances that are important in defining the overall building's historic character. Obviously character-defining front entrances should be given more importance than utilitarian back entrances.

4. The *Secretary of the Interior Standards for Historic Preservation* provides that deteriorated architectural features shall be repaired rather than replaced, whenever possible. In the event replacement is necessary, the new material should match the material being replaced in composition, design, color, texture and other visual qualities. Replacement of missing architectural features should be based on accurate duplications of features, substantiated by historical, physical or pictorial evidence rather than on conjectural designs or the availability of different architectural elements from other buildings. Based upon these provisions, replacing the wood doors with steel doors at 1417-1419 Clay Street would constitute a violation.
5. The *Historic Districts Ordinance* of the City Code charges the HPC with protecting and preserving historic buildings as well as maintaining appropriate settings and environments for such buildings (Section 35.1-44.1A). The Ordinance also stipulates that all decisions of the HPC shall be consistent with standards as established by the Secretary of the United States Department of the Interior (Section 35.1-44.1(g)(3)). The Certified Local Government Program, of which Lynchburg is a part, also stipulates that the HPC will approve alterations that are consistent with these standards.
6. History of COAs for 1417-1419 Clay Street

The following COAs have been issued for 1417-1419 Clay Street:

- May 22, 2001 – install white vinyl replacement windows conditional that the strike bar of the storm windows shall match the center strike bar of the window sashes
 - April 3, 2001 – replace asphalt shingle roof in kind
 - July 19, 1999 – remove chain link fence and replace with picket fence; remove three different types of railings and replace with 2 x 2 vertical railings
 - August 7, 1997 – install turbines (to vent air) on back side of roof
 - April 21, 1997 – apply vinyl trim around gable edges, overhangs and underside of porches
7. Entrances and porches are often the primary focal points of a historic structure's façade. Because of their rich decoration, they help define the style of the building. Entrances are functional and ceremonial for buildings. Decorative details of entrances and porches are often exposed to the elements and are the first such details to be removed when they deteriorate from lack of maintenance. Often the design and materials of historic doors are difficult to duplicate and owners substitute the original doors with stock items from building supply companies whose doors are more appropriate for new dwellings than historic houses. The current wood doors on Mr. Slaughter's house are not original but are stock doors. Since Mr. Slaughter requests to replace these doors, there is the opportunity to replace them with solid wood panel doors, which would be the material and design of the original doors.
 8. With the dwindling supply of energy resources and new efficiency demands placed on the existing building stock, many owners of historic buildings are assessing the ability of these buildings to conserve

energy with an eye to improving thermal performance. In historic buildings, many measures can result in the inappropriate alteration of important architectural features. In the case of 1417-1419 Clay Street, the HPC approved the installation of full-glass, painted storm doors, which has over the years, become an accepted addition to historic houses for energy efficiency. Storm doors are acceptable if added in such a way to minimize the visual impact on the building's appearance. Changing front entrance doors for new steel stock doors, however, is not an accepted alteration. Most historic wooden doors, if they are solid wood or paneled, have good thermal properties and should not be replaced with different materials.

9. Doors that would follow the guidelines can be purchased new or used (i.e., an architectural salvage yard). Estimates from local vendors for a salvaged solid wood historic door range from \$75 to \$150 each. Estimates for a new solid wood door range from \$200 to \$1,500. (The high end pricing may include brass fixtures, glass details and size.)

Request of Bobby G. Slaughter for a Certificate of Appropriateness to Alter the Property at 1417-1419 Clay Street

Mr. Bobby Slaughter, 1417-1419 Clay Street, represented his request. Mr. Slaughter explained that he wanted to replace the two front entrance hollow-core doors with steel doors on the duplex. He also requested to replace the aluminum storm doors with Pella-brand storm doors that would have full glass, and the trim would be white.

Commissioner Holloway referred to the Historic Districts Design Guidelines, page 37. He said according to the Guidelines, steel doors are not an appropriate option for a historic house. He said they are not historically accurate. The front doors should be constructed of wood. However, he said, the Pella-brand storm doors, as specified in the application, would be appropriate since it has long been recognized that storm doors were never original features of these older homes and are installed for energy efficiency.

Chair Stokes commented that the hollow-core doors are not original to the house. She said it would be more appropriate to have traditional wood doors which would have been installed at the time the house was built. She said steel is a modern material and does not fit the age of the house. She added that the main concern of having steel doors is that the entrance to a house is one of its most prominent features.

Mr. Slaughter said his house was covered with synthetic siding before he purchased the property. He also said the HPC had previously approved the installation of vinyl windows. He said he did not see how the installation of steel exterior doors would hurt the historic value of his home.

Commissioner Glass asked if there had been any precedent of steel exterior doors being approved in the past. Neither the HPC members nor the staff representative could recall steel doors ever being approved for a historic property.

Commissioner Glass asked Mr. Slaughter if he had researched the use of wood doors, and if one of the reasons he wanted steel doors was to make his house more secure. He explained that occasionally he had used steel and fiberglass doors for non-historic properties and, depending on the style of door, they could almost emulate doors found on historic properties due to the recessed or embossed panels on the doors.

Mr. Slaughter said he had not checked on wood doors because he preferred to have steel doors. He added that he was not concerned with crime in the neighborhood but was concerned about his neighbors.

Commissioner Holloway asked Mr. Slaughter if he could locate wood doors that are similar to the proposed steel door in order to meet the Design Guidelines and also satisfy his needs. He said the HPC was pleased that he wanted to replace the hollow core doors. But wood doors, which could be in the same design as the proposed steel doors, would be the appropriate material.

Mr. Slaughter said from the street a steel door would look like wood, and, if painted, no one would be able to distinguish the difference between the two materials.

Commissioner Glass said that Mr. Slaughter had a point. He said he understood the Design Guidelines recommendations, but added that the HPC did not oppose steel storm doors but opposed steel exterior doors, which might seem contradictory. He said if the steel doors were of a good grade and painted appropriately, it would be difficult to distinguish the difference between the two types of materials.

Commissioner Holloway responded by saying he did not consider the storm door a permanent fixture, but the exterior entry door would be permanent to the structure.

Commissioner Mott said she was not in favor of the steel doors because wood doors were the original material. She added that the fan light design in the proposed door also would not be appropriate, even if that same door

were constructed of wood. It would still not fit into the time period the house was built. She suggested that Mr. Slaughter look for wood doors at an architectural salvage store. She said she understood that he would need two doors but said he might get a better price at a salvage store than the price of two new steel doors.

Mr. Slaughter asked Commissioner Mott if she supported the installation of a solid wood door, why would she not support the installation of a wood door with a glass.

Commissioner Mott said the window design that Mr. Slaughter proposed was not in character with the house. She said there are other glass designs in doors that were built during the same time frame as the house. She said a manufactured door with the style glass that Mr. Slaughter proposed was too modern for a historic home.

Mr. Slaughter voiced his disagreement with Commissioner Mott.

Commissioner Fischer told Mr. Slaughter that he appreciated his desire to make improvements to his house. He continued by saying that the HPC had a responsibility to preserve the historic quality of his house for both him and the neighborhood and an additional obligation to Mr. Slaughter to help him maintain the value of his investment. He said he felt that Mr. Slaughter's request would work against this investment.

Mr. Slaughter said he was concerned with the value and security of his home and also the expense of heating the structure. He said he was able to install vinyl windows to help cut the cost of heating. He continued by saying that steel doors would add extra savings in cutting energy costs, as well as provide additional security. Mr. Slaughter said he was looking at this saving from the standpoint of a homeowner and was not as concerned that the exterior of his house was historically correct.

Commissioner Glass read from pages 39 and 40 of the Design Guidelines detailing the inappropriate replacement of exterior doors.

Chair Stokes said she preferred a wood door. She asked Mr. Slaughter if he would be willing to investigate purchasing wood exterior doors for his house. Mr. Slaughter said he preferred not to check into the purchase of wood doors as he would rather have steel doors. He said once the HPC acted on his request he would then decide whether he wanted to leave the current doors or investigate other options.

Commissioner Mott said she did not like the looks of the steel storm doors but understood the savings they could provide. She said Mr. Slaughter's choice of an all glass storm door would allow the exterior entrance door to be seen and that style of storm door was a good choice.

After further discussion, the HPC decided to separate Mr. Slaughter's request into two parts. Commissioner Holloway made the following motion, which was seconded by Commissioner Fischer and passed by the following vote:

"That the HPC hereby approves the request of Mr. Bobby G. Slaughter for a Certificate of Appropriateness (#996) to install matching steel Pella storm doors at 1417-1419 Clay Street according to his request dated May 6, 2002 to have full glass and to be painted white."

AYES:	Fischer, Glass, Holloway, Mott, Stokes	5
NOES:		0
ABSTENTIONS:		0

Commissioner Glass made the following motion, which failed for lack of a second and was denied:

"That the HPC hereby approves the request of Mr. Bobby G. Slaughter for a Certificate of Appropriateness (#70-Denied) to install matching steel front entrance exterior doors at 1417-1419 Clay Street according to his request dated May 6, 2002."